



Remembering Your Loved One

When Paula feels overwhelmed by raising three boys as a widowed single mom, she puts on her late husband's favorite baseball cap. Wearing it brings back memories of a loving, involved father, and inspires her to adopt his easygoing nature and patience. "Wearing the cap makes me realize how much I miss him and how different my life is now that he is gone. But I also feel connected to him when I wear the hat and empowered to be the best parent I can be," says Paula.

The role of remembrance

Although remembering a deceased loved one can renew feelings of loss, Paula's story demonstrates its healing potential. Rituals, such as lighting a remembrance candle or visiting a burial sight, and unforeseen moments when memories are triggered by something unexpected can help you move through the grieving process. Remembering serves to:

- honor a loved one's life and the role they played in shaping who you are
- acknowledge that life is no longer the same
- affirm that life still offers opportunities for joy and happiness
- comfort you in hard times, helping you to feel less alone
- through the perspective of others, develop a new understanding of your loved one
- help you accept and move past your loved one's flaws
- motivate you to adopt positive qualities that characterized your loved one
- keep the relationship alive
- provide a sense of connectedness between your past, present and future
- provide a direction for moving forward

Finding ways to remember

Reminiscence that is thoughtfully planned can help move you through the grieving process by putting you in control. Looking at photographs, sifting through personal possessions, rereading letters and revisiting a favorite place can help arouse memories when you are ready. These ideas can also help:

- Write a letter to your loved one to share your feelings, how your life has progressed and what you are looking forward to. Recall special times with your loved one, like an outing or a moment when your togetherness meant a lot. Share the aspects of your relationship that you particularly value and ways your life has been shaped by your loved one.
- Ask family members and friends to recall the stories and anecdotes that illustrate your loved one's personality and individuality. Get to know your loved one outside the role of "wife," "father" or "friend" by asking questions like "What things made him laugh?" "Did she have any unrealized dreams?" "What kind of impression did he make?" and "What did she do for fun?"
- Donate your time on your loved one's behalf by, for example, working at a soup kitchen, giving blood or distributing fliers for a favorite cause.
- Carry on a tradition or activity that was important to your loved one, like hosting Sunday dinner. Or create a new tradition with the help of family members in memory of your loved one.
- Create a memory scrapbook from photos and memorabilia.
- Plant a tree or bush as a living memorial.

- On special occasions and holidays, honor your loved one's memory by lighting a candle or leaving an empty chair at the table.
- Establish a scholarship fund in your loved one's name.
- Write a poem or paint a picture.
- On your loved one's birthday or anniversary of his death, celebrate his life. Spend the day at the beach if your loved one enjoyed the ocean or dine at a favorite restaurant. Wear your loved one's favorite color.
- Participate in "Remembering" programs, which are annual or biannual events offered by local places of worship.

Resources

In the Presence of Grief: Helping Family Members Resolve Death, Dying, and Bereavement Issues by Dorothy S. Becvar. Guilford Press, 2001.

The Path Through Grief by Marguerite Bouvard. Prometheus Books, 1998.

Sources:

AARP, American Association for Retired Persons (AARP)
www.aarp.org

In the Presence of Grief: Helping Family Members Resolve Death, Dying, and Bereavement Issues by Dorothy S. Becvar. Guilford Press, 2001.

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